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ABSTRACT

The pilot project, "A Pedagogy of the Land" (POL), provides an opportunity to ponder the relations between aboriginal community/university knowledges in this case, the relations between an Anishinaape land-based pedagogy and the developing theorizing around formal and informal learning. Traditional aboriginal education is not limited to elders teaching children. While elders are responsible for passing knowledge to the appropriate people when they are ready, any person older or more experienced in a particular knowledge than another has the potential to be that person's teacher. Education is a community responsibility taken seriously by each and every community member who at any moment can be in the position of teaching. The learning in POL does not fit any category of the "Basic Types of Intentional Learning." It involves traditional indigenous knowledge keepers with some fluency in their language whose knowledge arises from traditional Anishinaape world view in a program that allows them to build on one another's knowledge and prepare to pass it on to others who know less. Located on an isolated island in a large northern lake, POL has the goal to recreate indigenous knowledge in a contemporary context. Over a year, students attend two summer courses with an intervening research component. As participants work through their days in traditional activities, they incorporate sacred knowledge into their every action. Comments from Anishinaape teacher, Kaaren Dannenmann follow. (YLB)

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NALL Working Paper #16-2000

Some thoughts[1] on protocol in university/community partnerships

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Paper prepared for
Contested Terrain: The Boundaries and
Practical Impact of Informal Learning
NALL's Fourth Annual Conference: October 20 and 21, 2000.

Some thoughts on protocol in university/community partnerships

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I want to begin by acknowledging that we are on Anishinaape land today as we do our work: this building stands on Anishinaape land.[3] If we can learn to ground our theory and our research work in this fundamental understanding, perhaps we can begin the transformation of the university, maybe — alluding to Lori Moses's paper — even begin "to fix the world."

This paper is an attempt to take up Kathryn Church's invitation to continue the NALL discussion in a way that is positive and useful to those here today. I also want to acknowledge that without David Livingstone's generous invitation to be involved and the network's continued support for our project, which we have come to call A Pedagogy of the Land, our work would have been much more difficult. Those involved are partners Kaaren Dannenmann, Anishinaape trapper and teacher, who cannot be here because she is presenting her/our work at a conference in Winnipeg this weekend, myself, and research assistant Lori Moses. For us, the discussion that this project is stimulating around notions of formal/informal learning/education is proving to be fruitful ground for consideration of the relation between institutional and/or sanctioned knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge.[4] It allows us to continue questioning the (ab)use of connecting Aboriginal knowledge with universities. It is providing an opportunity to ponder the relations between Aboriginal community/university knowledges — specifically, in this case, the relations between an Anishinaape land-based pedagogy and the developing theorizing around formal and informal learning. Our analysis is moving in one part to establishing a

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protocol for work between universities and Aboriginal communities. I have submitted a SSHRC application to continue this work at Trout Lake and in another setting.

Let me also acknowledge here that I am presenting you with my perspectives as a white woman with some experience in Aboriginal communities and with Aboriginal education. If you want a more fitting analysis, it is imperative to work with Aboriginal people themselves who have experienced Canadian education in its many forms and who, through these experiences, have perspectives to contribute to theory which are simply not available anywhere else. For my part, I strive to be vigilant of the possibility that our work is re-inscribing colonization[5] onto Aboriginal knowledge as it is taken up in universities and/or by non-Aboriginal scholars.

Let me be very clear that I find the contested terrain of NALL a fruitful one. It is so rare to be involved with a group process at any level in working to build theory. I concur with the sentiments of Roxana Ng's recent e-mail that in our work together we have the opportunity to "open up, rather than foreclose debate....To subsume the diversity of perspectives under one framework would serve to limit what can be said and construct a narrative that isn't authentic." In relation to point three raised in Kathryn Church's statement, I too question whether making "common sense" of our work together is the route we want. Let's find ways to show how important divergence is — as we rigorously and systematically conduct our research. Let's find ways that our insights can be used respectfully to inform one another's work and struggle to put into place alternative ways for re-presenting what we have learned if that is what it takes to avoid homogenizing and sanitizing the complexity of the work we do. For me, one goal is the process of engaging with the productive tensions of our contexts even as we learn to appreciate what it means to create and re-create knowledge in those shifting contexts.

Moving into the discussion of the relation between formal/informal knowledge and traditional Aboriginal knowledge in the current context, I find some concerns. The problem I am having with the distinctions may have begun at the beginning when Group 3 was designated "Informal Learning Cultures" and was seen to be the location for work with Aboriginal communities. In reading David's September position paper "Adults' Informal Learning: Definitions, Findings, Gaps and Future Research" a number of other issues rose to the fore. I am concerned that the theory development is moving in a way that it is in danger of subsuming divergence in the interests of seamlessness. While I appreciated that Elders' teachings are mentioned — so often the existence of Aboriginal people is unacknowledged in theory — the basic types of (intentional) learning just do not seem to relate to the work we are doing in our project. I have only begun to formulate my concerns in this regard. Kaaren and I will talk together about this and she will teach me what I need to know. Nothing of what I say today should be seen to be her view or some generalized Aboriginal view.

I question, at this point, from the other side of the dichotomy between formal and informal both the claim, and the method which led to the claim, that formal education includes "elders initiating youth into traditional bodies of knowledge." There are limits to the congruence between these ideas and a need for refinement of the construction of the theoretical relations between traditional teachings and formal education. First of all, it is important to note that traditional aboriginal education is/was not limited to elders teaching children. Indeed children are/were seen to be fully fledged community members with roles and responsibilities appropriate to their abilities and maturity. While elders have/had the responsibility for passing knowledge to the appropriate people when they are ready, any person who is chronologically older or more experienced in a particular knowledge than another is seen to have the potential to be that person's teacher. Education as an activity is/was not limited to specific people teaching specific groups or even individuals. Education is/was a community responsibility taken seriously (and in humour) by each and every community member who at any moment can be in the position of teaching. To collapse traditional Aboriginal education into being only formal knowledge is to miss the nuances and the complexity of what counts as education in traditional Aboriginal contexts. (Just as problematic, in the first iteration of this theorizing, was to accept — as I was doing through aligning myself with Group 3 — that traditional forms of Aboriginal education were informal because they occur outside the physical walls of an institution. It was Kaaren Dannenmann's pointed questioning in our discussions which made clear to me the inappropriateness of this designation. On considering that concern, I believe— and again will discuss this with Kaaren — that her objection to traditional knowledge being relegated to informal knowledge was a sense that this knowledge had second class

status within mainstream society. Traditional knowledge, while also a concept in flux, is central to Aboriginal community. Equating elders' teachings to education based in a teacher authority delivering "a pre-established body of knowledge" (Livingstone, p.1) oversimplifies the relation.) Similarly Kathryn Church's point three in the discussion paper that First Nations/Aboriginal communities reverse the "existing conceptualization" (pps.2-3) is far too simple despite the fact that this claim draws directly on our discussions at the last meeting.

Moving to the typology developed in David's paper (p.2), I found myself struggling to make sense of, and then moving to critique, the model from the point of view of the Pedagogy of the Land. Aboriginal knowledges have a very special and disturbing place in the colonizing history of this country now called Canada. They are unique[6] in the disruption based in legislated initiatives such as residential schools formerly, and now exclusion from, or distortion within, history curricula which citizens (may) experience in schooling. They are also unique in their persistence in the face of these on-going assaults.

The learning based in Pedagogy of the Land simply does not "fit" in any of the categories presented as the "Basic Types of (Intentional) Learning." And let me be quick to point out this is not because I don't understand what the typology means or that I lack experience with the types of learning. Rather, it is because the curriculum of the Pedagogy of the Land is one which builds on fragments of knowledge held by people who simply have some knowledge. As far as I know, no one participating identifies themselves as an elder. Thrusting someone into that role— naming that person— is not seen as necessary, or even appropriate to the learning there. The program plans recognize that 1.) the knowledge sought as (to put it in inappropriately instrumental terms) outcomes for the program is being pieced together from fragments and tacit holdings that each knowledge keeper involved brings. In this way, each and every person there is truly a learner and a teacher. 2) this knowledge is being re-created in a contemporary context which recognizes that living cultures change, grow and shift.

Let me briefly outline the program to date. The Pedagogy of the Land is a pilot project which involves traditional indigenous knowledge keepers who have some fluency in their language and whose knowledge arises from traditional Anishinaape world view in a programme that allows them to build on one another's knowledge and to prepare to pass it on to others who know less than they do. These other people may be children, other aboriginal people who have less knowledge and ultimately, in a move to building economic self-sufficiency, very carefully selected eco-tourists. (Is it useful or even possible to slot these learners into the Basic Types of Learning?) The programme takes place on an isolated island in the middle of a large northern lake and is based in a curriculum of living together on this land over a period of two weeks. Its intent is to provide opportunity for the students, who are all also teachers for each other, to interact with one another using their everyday knowledge and to engage in a process of literally re-membering knowledges — in the sense of piecing them back together — that have been part of the lives of Anishinaape people since time began. Those who facilitate the courses are Kaaren and one other person who is qualified to teach in schools in Ontario: they are not the people who hold and deliver knowledge to the others. Rather, as the teachers/students with students/teachers (Freire 1977, p.67) work and live together, they build on one another's remembrances and expertise, with memory stimulating memory in a dialectical process. The ultimate goal is not to get back to the mythical old days but to re-create indigenous knowledge in a contemporary context.[7]

At times during the course, the students join together in sharing circles, what Graveline calls circle work (1998), to talk about the pedagogical implications of what they have been doing, to plan for the next steps of the course and to share thoughts and feelings about their work to that time. It is important to keep in mind that, for at least the last three or four centuries, the knowledge with which they are working has been systematically devalued by Eurocentric colonisers driven by a fervent commitment either to Christianity or to a market economy based in the industrial revolution or both. In the most intense attacks, the knowledge has been and, in some contexts continues to be, condemned as the devil's work. Thinking through these negative images — even for those deeply committed to Anishinaape world view — is heart rending and difficult work. There are no non-aboriginal people present for the courses. While I have been involved in the planning and conduct interviews with the people who have attended the program, I am not there for the courses themselves. In the summer of 2000, Lori Moses (Delaware Nation), a doctoral student in English at York, attended as a research assistant.

The program is designed so that over the period of a year, students attend two summer courses with an intervening research component during the fall, winter and/or spring. The curriculum which must have endless flexibility is based on what people do and on what they realize they know, through doing, as they live together in a place. So much for minute by minute lesson plans and predetermined performance indicators: one does not set a net if the wind is blowing too hard. As participants work through their days in traditional activities of gathering plants for foods and medicines, fishing and hunting, and building structures such as a sweat lodge, they incorporate sacred knowledge into their every action. While discussion of setting a net might be recorded in the research, the location of a medicinal plant or the conduct of a sacred ceremony is not grist for the research mill.

The research began by documenting the process of planning and offering the courses, with interviews forming the substance of the work. These interviews are carefully conducted and their use monitored by the research partners to reduce the danger of compromising sacred traditional knowledge which is not to written into any part of this project. We have moved to an initial analysis which takes up epistemological issues, specifically how can a university make sense of knowledge which cannot be written as well as theorising around informal and formal learning. In recognition that non-Aboriginal people have often glossed over important details when they over-enthusiastically begin to theorize Aboriginal education in Eurocentric terms, all research reports are reviewed by the people involved before they are circulated as text.[8]

This approach to research brings me to my second concern with placing Aboriginal knowledge in any simple typology. The concern arises in relation to the approach to research together we have been taking and is a methodological one. It remains unclear in David's text where the claim that Elders' teachings fit with notions of formal schooling originated from and who sanctioned it. Did a scholar of Aboriginal education make this claim? Is it taken from informal discussion? Why is it not referenced? Was there time to check back with the Aboriginal members of our network to see if the conceptualization worked for them? If we are working together in the theorizing related to this study, it is important that people's contributions are acknowledged and more important that there is opportunity (and direct invitation) to participate in ways which move beyond feeding information to the theory builders. While this conference clearly provides opportunity for such discussion, the question remains about how what we say here will be taken up and our role in the production of text based in these discussions. The truism " a little learning is a dangerous thing" springs to mind.

I came to this project because I have respect for what I see as its intentions, i.e. to find a way to recognize and legitimate knowledge which is not acquired as part of formal education as it is conducted within the material walls of schools and universities. And in many ways, I prefer that simple way of distinguishing formal and informal knowledge to the development of a complex typology, as long as, within those reductionist categories, space for nuanced debate is structured in and taken seriously. My research interests continue to be finding ways for people outside of academe or for people who have been marginalised in academe to have access to credentialing and to other resources available to scholars in universities so that their knowledges may have a respected place there. At the same time, I am most conscious of the ability of academics like myself to appropriate knowledge and worse to take it up in overly simple ways, to reduce it in the interests of building expansive theory. To avoid such epistemic violence, scholars must work with community people in every stage of developing theory in order to maintain respectful and fruitful "good relations."[9] One way to ensure this respect for one another is to establish protocols for research which allow for collaborative theory-building. To take such work seriously, I believe holds the potential for universities, at least in a few spaces, to address what has become impoverished theorizing. It is not enough for one person or a small group to take the data and run in the name of efficiency, smoothing over difference as a way to attain seamlessness.

Serious theoretical work also means constantly questioning the assumptions — the very theories — on which we are basing our work, taking seriously what Spivak calls a developed "theory of ideology." This theory of ideology allows us to keep always in mind the limitations of the theories which we are building as well as those which guide us and the need to continuously question their relevance as time moves and spaces shift. Spivak quoting Macherey writes: "...what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence." (1988:286). In what ways does this theory work around formal/informal/non-formal education and learning blind us

to knowledge and silence us or our partners in the face of the unspeakable?

I am going to finish with two moments which are guiding my work on this project right now. The first is Kaaren's insistence that we not simply relegate traditional Aboriginal knowledge to the realm of the informal combined with my discomfort with the too simple rendition of that concern as calling for a reversal of the formal/informal dichotomy. The second is an e-mail I received from research assistant Lori Moses the other day which said: "What happened to marginalized knowledges? Was there some big debate which consigned them to oblivion? I mean isn't the whole point to be done with institutionalized learning forever?" I responded that I find the university and the freedom of this research space in particular better than many other places I have encountered. I am concerned to hanging on to this space for the tiny pieces of "good" work it allows. I find work within this network a place with some space and some possibility. Now I watch for and hope for the construction of a theoretical space which honours the differences in the ways we have been able to take up the initial challenges of the project.

In closing, I leave you with Kaaren's words on research which, it seems to me, speak to her concerns about community, our efforts to work together on this project, and to the network's efforts to create space to work and construct knowledge together respectfully. She says, "For me, research equals muddling through our conflicts to build relationships and to build community. Research also equals figuring out how to use conflict and chaos to become more unified and stronger."

Notes

1. Research partner, Kaaren Dannenmann suggests flagging these words so that it is clear that this paper is a work in progress, as the title indicates, "some thoughts" to build on.

2. Kaaren and I corresponded on e-mail about the paper (October 23, 2000) and then sat together adding her comments throughout the text based in that e-mail and our on-going discussions (November 8, 2000). Her comments nuance what was originally said and are indicated by the initials KD before each quote.

3. KD: "The acknowledgment is powerful, not only because it grounds you (pl.) and your work, but it helps us work through our rage by validating our personal and collective experiences which were mostly hugely violent. The acknowledgment is necessary as a beginning of a relationship based on TRUST."

4. I want to point out that, although we call the program an Indigenous Knowledge Instructors' Program in publicity information, after our last discussion at NALL about the use of the terms "indigenous knowledge" , we have been more careful with the use of it in academic settings. The very loose use of the term during a session at CSSE in June 2000 continued the blurring of distinctions between knowledge which Aboriginal people have worked and lived with since time before memory (personal communication: Alice Williams, September 1999) and any knowledge which arises out of a workplace particularly on the land, such as the knowledge of miners or farmers. The term "aboriginal" then is an attempt to make clear the unique relation of the people with the land in this conception of knowledge. At the same time, I continue to see "indigenous knowledge" as an appropriate phrase for our work as it brings the land into a dialectical relation to the knowledge represented.

5. KD: "The word 'colonization' does not sit well with me for some reason: it sounds so benign. In history textbooks based on the colonisers' world view, colonizing has most often had positive connotations. As Norman Bethune writes about it in another context, 'Is it possible that a few rich, reactionary men, a small class of men, have persuaded a million men to attack and attempt to destroy another million men as poor as they? So that these rich may be richer still? Terrible thought! How did they persuade these poor men to come to China? By telling them the truth? No, they never would have come if they had known the truth. Did they dare tell these workmen that they only wanted cheaper raw materials, more markets and more profit? No, they told them that this brutal war was for "The Destiny of the Race," it was for the "Glory of the Emperor," it was for the "Honour of the State." False, false as hell!" (Allan and Gordon 1952:315). Conventional understandings of colonization have hidden the violence which inevitably comes with it, not only in the physical sense, but in the violent assault on the personal and collective psyche of those peoples the colonizers oppress. When it comes to

'decolonizing', this term holds the danger of equalizing responsibilities in this process without talking about the differences of those responsibilities"

6. KD: "I want to say something about the word "unique.' We want a word to describe the act of singling out a particular people for genocide and why. And that 'why' has to do with the land. In that regard, I highly recommend seeing a video entitled The Story Book."

7. KD: "You talk about re-creating indigenous knowledge in a contemporary context. Does that have to be explained? It seems to me (Dumas 2000) that if we describe indigenous knowledge in terms of relationships (one's relationship with one's self, with one's family and community, with the environment, with all of creation and Creator herself) then all the things we want out of life — peace, happiness, respect, security, sustainability, etc., etc — are within reach. It's just a monumental struggle to learn and to do."

8. KD: "I am so glad to see that in black and white: it is exactly what I have realised I need to start doing with other community members, to give THEM reports of what is happening in the course. If people are not getting information, they feel left out of the loop even if they were in on earlier decisions, choices, and plans."

9. KD: "As I was reading about maintaining respectful and fruitful "good relations," I wanted to ask you if you constantly feel like you're walking on egg-shells with this research, and if the egg-shells were growing into a whole field of egg-shells. But, as I related it to my community and trying to make sure that no one feels alienated from the work, I thought, if you're working with respect and developing good relations, then the egg-shells aren't really there, are they? For me "good relations" includes an understanding that mistakes will be made, but they will be taken as learning experiences, not crimes."

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